

Towards a Biblical Understanding of Spiritual Warfare

Spiritual warfare is a reality in life, families, and ministry. This dissertation's definition of spiritual warfare is based off Ephesians 6:12: "the battle of the followers of Christ against the unseen spiritual forces of evil." Many approaches to spiritual warfare primarily place their focus upon demonic manifestations when speaking of Satan's attacks. Scripture reveals a much broader and more comprehensive strategy of how the devil and his demons attack believers.

The Bible refers to believers having three main enemies: the flesh, the world, and the devil (Eph 2:1-3). When believers feel attacked in life or ministry, they often try to discern the source of their difficulty, oppression, or temptation. These investigations are often unfruitful as "Scripture reveals that it is difficult- if not impossible- to separate the temptations that arise from these three sources."¹ No matter what specific source the opposition arises from, Christians have individual responsibility for their sin while their spiritual success rests solely on Christ's power.²

Scripture clearly attributes some instances of spiritual conflict directly to Satan. By considering these examples, believers can be aware of the Evil One's schemes and strategies so that they "would not be outwitted by Satan" (2 Cor 2:11) while advancing the Gospel in their evangelistic and disciple making callings (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 1:8).

Approach and Delimitations

This author's approach is to briefly look at scriptural instances of Satan's attacks. The categorization of the biblical texts helps to reveal the enemy's strategy against believers. An understanding of Satan's strategy allows Christians to be wise to

¹Neil Anderson and Robert Saucy, *God's Power at Work in You* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2001), 282-83.

²Ibid., 284.

the enemy's ways so that they can better walk with and serve Christ through evangelism and discipleship. Space does not allow for a comprehensive or in-depth treatment of this topic. Nevertheless, this section functions as a simplified, biblical overview of how the enemy attacks, demonstrating the biblical reality of spiritual warfare. If space allowed, these passages would be explored to greater depth and more Scriptures, such as those found in the appendix, would be considered and evaluated.

Spiritual Warfare in the Scriptures

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded (Jas 4:7-8)

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. (2 Thess 2:9-10)

Satan stands against Christian believers and will do anything to attempt to stop the advance of the kingdom of God. The Lausanne Movement's 1993 Statement on Spiritual Warfare states that evangelism "involves an inescapable element of spiritual warfare."³ Since "biblical church planting is evangelism that results in new churches," church planters can expect to encounter the devil's attacks as they evangelize the lost.⁴ Whether in church planting, cross-cultural evangelism (missions), or near-culture evangelism, evangelistic efforts can anticipate demonic resistance. The battle for souls is very real and will continue to rage until Christ returns. Christians must understand and have "a healthy respect for the unseen world."⁵

³A. Scott Moreau, ed., *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission* (Monrovia, CA: World Vision International, 2002), xvii.

⁴Jervis David Payne, *Discovering Church Planting: An Introduction to the Whats, Whys, and Hows of Global Church Planting* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2009), 4.

⁵Tom Nebel and Gary Rohmayer, *Church Planting Landmines: Mistakes to Avoid in Years 2 through 10* (St. Charles IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2005), 102.

The devil and his demons are so powerful that man-centered efforts towards evangelism and discipleship will fail for “only spiritual weapons can prevail, especially the Word and the Spirit, with prayer.”⁶ Satan’s powerful attacks against believers and ministers are often in the areas of “discouragement, distractions, or disqualifications.”⁷ Despite the power of the opposition and deception, Christians must remain in the truth of God’s possession of them (1 John 4:4) and are called to submit to and draw near to God while resisting Satan through righteous lives and minds (Jas 4:7-8).

God’s Role Vs. Satan’s Role Vs. Our Role

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. (Gen 50:20)

Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him. And Saul's servants said to him, “Behold now, a harmful spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord now command your servants who are before you to seek out a man who is skillful in playing the lyre, and when the harmful spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will be well.” (1 Sam 16:14-16)

And whenever the harmful spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him. (1 Sam 16:23)

Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, “Go, number Israel and Judah.” (2 Sam 24:1)

But David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the Lord, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly.” (2 Sam 24:10)

So the Lord sent a pestilence on Israel from the morning until the appointed time. And there died of the people from Dan to Beersheba 70,000 men.” (2 Sam 24:15)

And Micaiah said, “Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and the Lord said, ‘Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, ‘I will entice him.’ And the Lord said to him, ‘By what means?’ And he said, ‘I will go out, and will be a lying spirit

⁶Alan Nichols and Billy Graham, eds., *The Whole Gospel for the Whole World: The Story of the Second Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, Manila, 1989* (Charlotte, NC: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1989), 116.

⁷Nebel and Rohrmayer, *Church Planting Landmines*, 103.

in the mouth of all his prophets.’ And he said, ‘You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.’ Now therefore behold, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the Lord has declared disaster for you.” (1 Kgs 22:19-23)

Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel. (2 Chr 21:1)

Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord. (Job 2:1)

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” (Jas 1:12-15)

Across the Scriptures there is a seemingly complicated interaction between the roles and responsibilities of God, His people, and His enemies. In some instances, God removes His presence and sends evil spirits (demons) as a punishment (1 Sam 16:14-23, 1 Kgs 22:19-23). In some situations God uses human evil towards His good plans (Gen 50:20). On numerous occasions across Scripture, God directly punishes His people through His own hand or through the use of His angelic beings. At other times God directs, allows, or permits Satanic and demonic attacks that are seemingly disconnected from serving as any sort of punishment (Job 1-2, Paul in 2 Cor 12:7-10). Still, in other instances there is a very real and simultaneous interaction between God’s hand, Satan’s hand, worldly temptations, and human sinfulness that result in both individual and corporate suffering (2 Sam 24:1-15, 2 Chr 21:1). In spiritual warfare situations, Christians often desire to discover a single source and solution for their problems, but are reminded from these passages that the interaction between sources is often different in each case, but the solution is always to actively “wage the good warfare” (1 Tim 1:18) of the Christian faith.

Wage the Good Warfare

This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. (1 Tim 1:18-20)

The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. (Luke 8:12)

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Cor 4:3-4)

And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. (2 Cor 11:14-15)

The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels. (Matt 13:38-39)

Christians are not to remain passive in the battle between Satan's followers and Christ's followers. In understanding the role of the church, it is essential to know that it is "not primarily about techniques." Disciple making Christians are "venturing into 'occupied territory' only to be greeted by forces, seen and unseen, conspiring to work against any work of God."⁸ Satan desires to keep the lost blinded and deceived so that they do not experience God's truth and light. Believers are called to engage in spiritual warfare so that the gospel light penetrates the darkness of the world.

There are no sideline strategies for believers, but all "must be prepared for spiritual warfare."⁹ One of Satan's avenues is through false teachers, as Paul points out in his publicly rebuking and discipline of Alexander, Hymenaeus, and Philetus. These false teachers not only make "shipwreck" of their own faith, but also "are upsetting" the faith of others (1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:17). God reminds his children that spiritual warfare is both a necessity and a reality in this age, but by drawing near to God they may "wage the good warfare" against the kingdom of darkness.

⁸Jim Griffith and Bill Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes Made by New Church Starts* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008), 16.

⁹Ibid.

Take Up the Full Armor of God

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Eph 6:10-17)

When believers begin to understand the reality of spiritual warfare and their call to engage the enemy they will more diligently prepare for combat. Ephesians 6:10-20 is one of the most commonly-referenced passages for understanding spiritual warfare. Clinton Arnold explains it with statements concerning the importance of understanding the reality of the demonic, the availability and necessity of God's power, and the primacy of prayer and one's identity in Christ.¹⁰ Christians must not ignore the "presence, influence, power, and hostility" of Satan's realm, but should protect themselves, their families, and their churches from Satan's ongoing attacks.¹¹

God's full armor provides the only protection for a believer. When Christians draw near to God in "intimate fellowship," they will be "able to stand against the schemes of the Evil One" and be "ready for any spiritual opposition."¹² Taking "up the

¹⁰(1) "There are powerful, invisible, spirit beings that attack believers with the intent of hurting them, causing them to lapse into sin, or making them ineffectual for God's kingdom purposes." (2) "The goal of depending on the power of God is to resist the varied attacks of the evil one and to advance the kingdom of God into the world." (3) "God's power is truly available to his people." (4) "Prayer is the essence of spiritual warfare and the most important means by which believers are strengthened by God." (5) "It is vital to understand our new identity in Christ as a deep level and to live out of that new identity as a means of overcoming the impact of various forms of demonic assault." Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 470-75.

¹¹Joel Rainey, *Planting Churches in the Real World* (Smyrna, DE: Missional Press, 2008), 124-25, 129.

¹²Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 75-77.

whole armor of God” practically works out through a daily walk with Christ by internalizing his truths and living dependently on his strength.

Pray Continually

. . . praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. (Eph 6:18-20)

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thess 5:16-18)

Continual prayer is not simply “preparation for the battle; prayer is the battle.”¹³ Just as communication reveals the true health of a marriage relationship, “private prayer is the revealer of the true spiritual condition of the human heart.”¹⁴ If believers “neglect communication with their heavenly Father, they are risking disaster.”¹⁵ The more intimately Christ followers get to know their Father through “a disciplined prayer life,” the more access they will have to the Lord and his powerful work in their lives, families, and churches.¹⁶ In addition to personal prayer, the believer needs to pray specifically for both new and mature believers while soliciting prayer for themselves.¹⁷

Keep Them from the Evil One

Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.(2 Cor 2:5-11)

¹³Nebel and Rohrmayer, *Church Planting Landmines*, 101.

¹⁴Darrin Patrick, *Church Planter: The Man, The Message, The Mission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 63.

¹⁵Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 73.

¹⁶Nebel and Rohrmayer, *Church Planting Landmines*, 112.

¹⁷Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 74; Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes Made by New Church Starts*, 17.

When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. (1 Cor 5:4-5)

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. (John 17:15)

A believer's initial response to the enemy's presence in this world might be to desire flee the battle in order to be with Christ in heaven. Although heaven is the ultimate destination for believers in Christ, their temporal call is to remain in this world while limiting Satan's access to their lives and ministries. Darrin Patrick warns of the real encounters with the Evil One, saying "if you don't think demons are real, try planting a church! You won't get very far in advancing God's kingdom without feeling resistance from the enemy."¹⁸

Despite Satan's attacks, Christians can be effective through a "dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit."¹⁹ Becoming aware of Satan's schemes helps a believer to more faithfully walk and humbly serve in the power of God with "wisdom," "boldness," and "perseverance."²⁰ Christians should not seek encounters with Satan, but when such encounters occur, believers can stand confidently in their identification with Christ.

Conquerors through Christ

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:37-39)

he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21)

"Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips. (Job 2:10)

¹⁸Patrick, *Church Planter*, 64.

¹⁹Ibid., 59.

²⁰Jervis David Payne, *The Barnabas Factors: Eight Essential Practices of Church Planting Team Members* (Smyrna, DE: Missional Press, 2008), 23.

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” (Luke 10:17-20)

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matt 16:18)

But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. (1 Thess 2:17-18)

No matter how spiritual warfare manifests itself in the life of an individual or church family, believers “have great power to see their ministries thrive—if they depend on God.”²¹ No matter the way Satan attacks, a believer or church will mature if they prioritize a God-dependency.²² Although God has not removed the believer from the battlefield, He has equipped the Christian to advance, fight, and stand confidently with the understanding that nothing can separate them from their relationship with Him. In the midst of Satan’s attacks, the believer can trust, like Job (Job 1:21, 2:10), that God is still in control “of the frequency and intensity of the conflict you encounter.”²³

Worldly and Fleshly Attacks

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? (Jas 4:1)

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31)

²¹Nebel and Rohrmayer, *Church Planting Landmines*, 107.

²²Ibid., 109.

²³Rainey, *Planting Churches in the Real World*, 122.

Although Satan does attack believers and churches directly, it often appears through attacks from the world and the flesh. In this section passages will be considered that explore some of the directions of conflict from the enemy. Just as God commands believers to love Him and love others, Satan seeks to turn our attention away towards a self-centered love. He does this by shifting our strength (action), soul (desires), heart (emotions), and mind (thoughts) away from God and others, both in private and in public.

Sin: Self-Centered Action or Inaction

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil (Eph 4:26-27)

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:8-10)

So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light (Rom 13:13)

each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (Jas 1:14-15)

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. (1 John 5:18)

Chuck Lawless argues that “spiritual warfare isn’t about naming demons; it’s about so living a righteous life that our very life threatens the Enemy.”²⁴ Sin is part of the “enemy’s strategy is to derail effective leaders” and churches.²⁵ Satan’s role as tempter does not negate believers’ accountability for their decision to sin.²⁶ This responsibility is seen in biblical pastoral qualifications describing “a man who is free

²⁴Charles Lawless, *Discipled Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches That Are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002), 214.

²⁵Nebel and Rohrmayer, *Church Planting Landmines*, 107.

²⁶Patrick, *Church Planter*, 147.

from any serious character blights, is respected by those who know him, and is widely known to live a godly life.”²⁷ Although such biblical qualifications may seem unrealistically high, their design is to prepare the pastor for spiritual warfare and to model for all believers who to stand firm in this evil day (Eph 6:13). Prayer is often highlighted as the main weapon Christians have in their battle against the Evil One. Although God repeatedly emphasizes prayer in spiritual warfare, a believer’s holy living through internalized truth makes such prayers Christ-empowered (Eph 4:25-32; 1 Thess 5:16-22). Following God’s call to love Him and others with strength (Mark 12:30-31) manifests itself in righteous, God-produced obedience as a living faith (Rom 12:1; Jas 2:17).

Soul Temptations: Pride

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12:7-10)

He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. (1 Tim 3:6-7)

God allowed Satan to attack Peter so that Peter realized that “he could not stand on his own.”²⁸ In the midst of life successes, many Christians may swell with prideful belief, thinking that they are responsible for God’s powerful work. Paul warned of such a pride, cautioning not to rely on “rhetorical strategies and techniques, and certainly not on social or psychological factors” but to trust in the “power of God, which

²⁷Ibid., 46.

²⁸John MacArthur, *Standing Strong: How to Resist the Enemy of Your Soul* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2006), 34.

is present in the preaching of the gospel of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.”²⁹ When Satan sees believers’ pride in their own perceived strengths, he attacks “because he already has us in our weaknesses.”³⁰ Pride reveals itself in not only one’s strengths, but also in their weaknesses. Failures may reveal that Christians have often quenched the Spirit’s work by their prideful independence of and disobedience towards God.³¹ Pride is ultimately a self-love of the soul, in place of God’s call to first love Him and to love others second.

Heart Temptations: Anxiety, Suffering, and Finances

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. (1 Pet 5:6-9)

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. (1 Tim 6:9-10)

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. (Heb 13:5)

God’s call is often to “places where results, humanly speaking, are meager.”³²

These places in life when minimal results are seen can also be times of hostility rather than sympathy or neutrality.³³ Satan uses circumstances to try to target believers through

²⁹Eckhard Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 371.

³⁰Rainey, *Planting Churches in the Real World*, 124.

³¹Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours* (London: Robert Scott, 1912), 126.

³²James Engel and William Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 88.

³³Eckhard Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission: Jesus and the Twelve* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 671.

emotional responses such as “fear, depression, worry, criticism, competitiveness, and jealousy.”³⁴ These real or perceived circumstances can serve to isolate the Christian from their only source of hope, joy, strength, protection, and provision in Christ. Believers must diligently root themselves in God’s Word so that their identity in Christ remains on the forefront of their minds and hearts.

Mind Temptations

But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” (Matt 16:23)

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom 12:2)

One of Satan’s best avenues of attack is to tempt believers to have their minds set on the things of man rather the things of God. Just as God “never bypasses our mind,” Satan’s strategy is to deceive believers into thinking and following their own inclinations and minds.³⁵ Christians must test their thoughts, strategies, plans, and ideas with God’s Word to ensure that their leadership is in line with God’s good, pleasing and perfect will. Such a renewal of a believer’s mind “begins with genuine repentance” that leads to being rooted in truth.³⁶

Private Temptations: Marriage and Family

For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (1 Cor 7:4-5)

³⁴Nebel and Rohrmayer, *Church Planting Landmines*, 106.

³⁵Neil Anderson, *Discipleship Counseling* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2003), 87.

³⁶Anderson and Saucy, *God’s Power at Work in You*, 136.

One of Satan's desires is to privately destroy not only the believer, but also his marriage and family, in order to derail the believer's public witness. Sexual temptation is a primary method of attack that the devil uses, hence God's warnings to married couples that they must be sexually intimate regularly. Christians must ensure that they do not "focus well on their spiritual lives" to the neglect of their marriages and families.³⁷ Just as God designed pastors to lead churches, He also ordained husbands to "take the lead in emotional, social, and sexual connection with their wives."³⁸ The Christian must not be unaware of Satan's tactics; he must be prepared for his marriage and family to "experience mental, moral, and physical attacks from the Evil One."³⁹ If Satan can wound or kill Christians' marriages or families, he can effectively paralyze them from evangelistic ministry and disciple making through their church. Believers must prioritize their love of their families and wives so that they may stand firm together against the devil's schemes.

Public Temptations: Church Ministry

Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel. (1 Chr 21:1)

After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." . . . So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." (John 13:21-27)

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death." Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me." (Luke 22:31-34)

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias,

³⁷Patrick, *Church Planter*, 102.

³⁸Ibid., 46.

³⁹Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 77.

why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.” (Acts 5:1-4)

Christians have unique pressures that can lead to temptations to publicly misrepresent oneself to one’s church, denomination, or contributors.⁴⁰ The range of ethical dilemmas is numerous, but the underlying heart issue is one of self-worship rather than God-worship. Whether the heart issue results in the misrepresentation of numerical growth, giving, or of one’s spiritual health, the desire to be approved by man rather than God is a dangerous lie. Believers must first test themselves to see whether they are in the faith and secondly to ensure that they are not just hearers, but doers of God’s Word (2 Cor 13:5; Jas 1:22-27).⁴¹ Satan desires to see hypocrites in churches because he realizes that he can use the failures of a few to cause many to stumble.

Summary of a Biblical Understanding of Spiritual Warfare

All Christians must recognize that “the life of the disciple is the life of constant spiritual warfare.”⁴² This understanding leads a believer to both acknowledge and anticipate real Satanic attacks upon their lives, families, and ministries.⁴³ Christians should accordingly prepare, pray, and walk uprightly such that the devil has no opportunity to gain a foothold for attack.⁴⁴ Through their ongoing walk with God, the believer will be best equipped to depend on God for His power and strength in advancing the Gospel through evangelism and discipleship.

⁴⁰Patrick, *Church Planter*, 23.

⁴¹Ibid., 26.

⁴²Payne, *Discovering Church Planting*, 77.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Payne, *The Barnabas Factors*, 17.